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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP AND OES/SAT
NASA FOR MICHAEL O'BRIEN AND PATRICK BESHA

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TAGS: [TSPL](#) [TSPA](#) [EIND](#) [SENV](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: NASA ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR EXPANDS SPACE
COLLABORATION WITH SAUDI ARABIA

1. (SBU) Summary: NASA Assistant Administrator O'Brien's December 8 - 10 visit to Riyadh reinvigorated collaboration between NASA and KACST, Saudi Arabia's science ministry. During the visit, KACST and NASA signed a joint statement recognizing the Saudi Lunar and Near Earth Object Science Center as an affiliate partner with the NASA Lunar Science Institute at Ames Research Center, California. The warm, positive atmosphere surrounding O'Brien's visit was an indication of the Saudis' eagerness to expand its cooperation with NASA. Tours of KACST's facilities highlighted the Kingdom's commitment to its research programs, and demonstrated Saudi capabilities as a key regional player in NASA's outreach to non-traditional partners. NASA and KACST agreed to explore collaboration in several areas, including developing a statement of intent for potential signature during NASA Administrator Bolden's tentative visit to Riyadh for the twenty-fifth anniversary of Prince Sultan bin Salman's participation in the Discovery mission in June 2010. KACST's enthusiasm and demonstrated commitment bodes well for future bilateral science and technology collaboration, which was encouraged by President Obama in his Cairo speech. End summary.

2. (SBU) NASA's Assistant Administrator for External Relations Michael O'Brien visited Riyadh December 8 - 10 for meetings with the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) and with former astronaut Prince Sultan bin Salman Al-Saud, now the head of Saudi Arabia's Commission for Tourism and Antiquities. Prince Sultan told O'Brien he hoped NASA Administrator Charles Bolden would travel to Riyadh for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Discovery mission in June 2010. Sultan is the first and only Saudi in space, and is passionate about reuniting the crew from the 1985 Discovery mission in which he participated. Sultan also expressed his interest in bringing the Discovery to Saudi Arabia once it is retired from NASA's fleet. O'Brien explained that U.S. institutions would first have the opportunity to host the shuttle before international bidders were considered. Asked about Saudi participation on the international space station, O'Brien said the space station was fully functional and handed over information for potential researchers. Sultan shared several fond anecdotes from his time in the United States, and said our bilateral relationship "needs to detox" through reinvigorated educational and scientific exchanges to rebuild the high level of trust we once shared.

3. (SBU) Vice President for Research Institutes Prince Turki Al-Saud personally hosted O'Brien in Riyadh after having met during the December 3 - 4 Science and Technology Agreement Space Working Group meeting in Washington, as well as during

the December 7 - 9 Global Space Technology Forum in Abu Dhabi. On December 9, KACST and NASA signed a joint statement recognizing the Saudi Lunar and Near Earth Object Science Center as an affiliate partner with the NASA Lunar Science Institute at Ames Research Center, California. O'Brien also visited KACST's National Satellite Technology Program, Solar Village, Laser Ranging station, and Electronics, Communications, and Photonics research facilities. KACST plans on creating up to 15 Technology Implementation Centers (TICs) to commercialize scientific discoveries and spur Saudi universities to expand their research activities. Dr. Turki said KACST planned to expand its facilities from four to 27 buildings, and its workforce from 2,500 to 12,000, by 2014. Dr. Turki and several scientists in the National Satellite Technology Program expressed their desire for increased exchanges and collaboration with NASA's Ames Research Center in California, with which the Saudis have a historic relationship.

¶4. (SBU) NASA and KACST agreed to explore potential cooperation in the following areas:

- Draft a statement of intent outlining specific areas of potential cooperation, which could be signed during the NASA Administrator's tentative June 2010 visit.
- Renew the expired Satellite Laser Ranging agreement.
- Complete and sign an AERONET agreement between KACST and NASA.
- Develop a scholarship program similar to NASA's program with the UAE.
- Collaborate on carbon monitoring.
- Conduct joint research on small satellites.
- Conduct research on the International Space Station.

- Conduct science collaboration with the NASA Lunar Science Institute.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The Saudis, and Dr. Turki in particular, seem sincerely committed to expanding their space program and clearly see NASA as a key partner in this expansion. Dr. Turki is a Stanford University graduate who knows U.S. science and technology infrastructure inside and out. The amount of personal time spent with O'Brien, as well as the focus on tangible results, was a strong indicator that KACST is serious about partnering with the United States, and NASA in particular. The Embassy strongly endorses this partnership as a tangible demonstration of our implementation of the President's Cairo speech agenda.

¶6. (U) NASA Assistant Administrator O'Brien cleared on this cable.
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